

Congressman Kevin McCarthy today highlighted [H.R. 1581](#), legislation he introduced to increase access to public lands for all Americans. The Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011 would release approximately 43 million acres of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) for use by the public. These lands have been recommended by their managing agencies, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service, respectively, as not suitable for wilderness, but that is essentially how they are being managed. This means that public access and activities on these lands is severely limited. H.R. 1581 would act on the BLM and Forest Service recommendations and open up the specified 43 million acres for multiple use.

"Millions of acres of land across the United States are being held under lock and key unnecessarily," said Congressman McCarthy. "My bill acts on recommendations made by the government agencies managing these lands so they are opened up for increased public use. This is just common sense. By opening these lands up to residents of our local communities and across the country for their use and enjoyment, we can help create jobs, boost local economies and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires."

Starting in the 1970s, BLM and the U.S. Forest Service conducted studies on millions of acres of land they managed. Of the over 12 million acres of WSAs managed by BLM, 6.7 million acres were recommended as not suitable for wilderness. The Forest Service recommended 36 million acres of IRAs as not suitable for wilderness. Because Congress has not acted on these recommendations, the nearly 43 million acres have remained under restrictive management practices similar to those reserved for actual Wilderness Areas that severely hinder public access and use. This legislation addresses these recommendations and opens up these lands for multiple use, including increased recreation and responsible resource development, which is why it enjoys wide support. Specifically, the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011 would:

- Lift the restrictive management practices on these specific 43 million acres and direct that they be managed for multiple use, which includes increased recreational opportunities, responsible resource development and better access for firefighting capabilities;
- Terminate Secretarial Order 3310 with specific regard to the BLM lands released by this bill to ensure that these lands cannot be restricted again by the Interior Department administratively designating them "Wild Lands;" and
- Terminate the 2001 and 2005 Nationwide Roadless Rules with specific regard to the Forest Service lands released by this bill to return these lands' management planning process to local communities, who know best how their local land should be managed.

"I applaud Congressman McCarthy. This legislation is a reasonable and practical means of promoting sustainable economies in the rural west by providing a multitude of land uses. For too long, public activity and uses consistent with the Federal Land Management Policy Act have been locked out of these lands. Congressman McCarthy's bill will implement the professional judgment and recommendations of the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service," said Supervisor Jon McQuiston.

This legislation would open up approximately 218,000 acres in Kern County. There are 11 WSAs in the Bakersfield Field Office jurisdiction totaling 21,143 acres, of which 18,000 have been recommended as not suitable for wilderness. There are 7 IRAs within the Sequoia National Forest with over 200,000 acres that have been recommended as not suitable for wilderness. The Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011 does not direct that the lands released by this legislation be used for any specific activity; rather, it allows local land managers and surrounding communities to determine through the local land management planning process whether these areas ought to be used for these activities or not.

"We support this long-overdue bill for family recreation and the environment," added Stewards of the Sequoia Executive Director Chris Horgan. "It is wonderful when one bill benefits recreation, rural economies and the environment, allowing future generations access to enjoy the great outdoors. These lands have languished for far too long and we think reasonable people across America will join us in supporting this much needed legislation."

Allowing these lands to be managed as multiple use areas opens them up to responsible resource development such as healthy forest management and grazing, as well as numerous recreational activities including motorized sporting and increased hunting and fishing. These activities would help create jobs and generate new revenue for local communities across the country. In addition, opening up these lands would make it much easier to clear fallen and rotting trees and underbrush, reducing the danger of the out-of-control wildfires that have been prevalent in California and around the nation in recent years.

"From a firefighting perspective, the opening of these lands will give those who are "Sworn to Protect" a fighting chance to aggressively attack wildland fires in the early stages," said Kern County Fire Chief Nick Dunn. "The firefighting community in concert with those agencies who manage these lands can and will develop responsible "Healthy Forest" management plans to reduce the threat of out-of-control wildfires. The Kern County Fire Department this past year had four of the largest fires in California. Our proactive fire planning approach to reduce the threat of wildfires in the communities of Tehachapi, Kernville and Lebec were proven to be a great success."

The Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act of 2011 is cosponsored by 22 members of Congress and is supported by over 60 local, state and national groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Western Business Roundtable, National Rifle Association, Americans for Responsible Recreational Access, California Cattlemen's Association, and the Mojave Trails Group.

"On behalf of the Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce, we strongly support this bill. The studies have been completed and the areas have been recommended as unsuitable for wilderness. It is time to turn these areas back to the local communities to develop land use plans that benefit all of us. The Kern River Valley economy depends upon our visitors. When access to the Federal Lands is restricted, our economy suffers," said Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce Vice President and USFS Retired Division Chief Fred Roach. "Also, we tend to forget that when these areas are closed, the infrastructure deteriorates to the point that fire equipment cannot use them for access to wildland fires. Not only can we not treat the fire fuels on the ground, we cannot gain access when needed to successfully fight the fires."

To read an additional fact sheet, [click here](#) .